

# FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

November/December 2006

## SAME JOB, DIFFERENT PLACE

Firefighters  
unite globally



### WIN!

A TomTom ONE  
portable satnav



### Regional Controls

The Union puts  
forward Plan B



### Dyslexia

Mounting paperwork  
doesn't help but attitudes  
to the disability are  
changing, boosted by  
new legislation

### Merseyside

Dispute ends with  
the FBU making  
significant  
advances



# Settlement in Merseyside



I am sure every single member will join me in congratulating the FBU members in Merseyside for their settlement

and return to work following their recent strike action.

It is clear to anyone who bothers to look that they faced not just a direct attack in terms of cuts but also an agenda based on attempting to divide and attack the Fire Brigades Union itself. To their enormous credit, the Merseyside members stood firm in the face of this and in the face of provocative and intimidatory tactics.

Despite the settlement there is still financial hardship faced by our members and their families. I would urge all members, branches and committees of the union to organize another drive to raise money for the Merseyside Hardship Fund. Every penny sent is an investment in the future for all of us.

I would also like to congratulate everyone who attended the march and rally in Liverpool on 15 September. This was organised at very short notice yet the attendance was one for which we can all be extremely proud. The march filled the streets of Liverpool with thousands of our members and the support from the public was clear to one and all. I would like to thank the other trades unionists who marched with us and who spoke at the rally. Again, this demonstrated the breadth of support our members enjoy in the Labour movement.

I would finally like to thank the drummers of the samba band who provided the rhythm for the day and who had the hardest job on the march. If you weren't there you missed something – don't miss the next one!

## Frustration at CPD/LSI delays

I am aware of the growing level of frustration over Long Service Increment (LSI) and Continual Professional Development (CPD) pay. As I write this, most fire authorities have reduced LSI, even though no agreement has been reached on CPD. Long Service members are experiencing a pay cut despite being unable to access the CPD payments. This is completely unacceptable.

The negotiations on CPD have taken many months and have been extremely complex. This is an inevitable result of the agreement reached in 2003 whereby CPD will be funded from the net savings from the abolition of LSI. An agreement could have been reached – but it would have been entirely on the employer's terms. For example, the employers' proposals would see firefighters paid differently in each authority and members in county brigades would be considerably worse off than those in the metropolitan authorities. The proposals put so far have therefore been unacceptable to the negotiators.

It is still possible that an agreement can be reached and detailed work involving the statistics is being discussed with the employers. The union maintains that fire authorities should not be reducing LSI pay



in the absence of an agreement. I understand the anger at local level. I can assure you that the union, and its advisors, has been looking into all possibilities for challenging this action by the employers

## Firefighter deaths – USA and Iraq

Finally, I need to report further tragic news regarding colleagues across the world. You may have seen press reports regarding

the death of four firefighters in California. The four died following a fire east of Los Angeles.

You will also be saddened to hear of the deaths of four firefighters in Iraq. The four were shot dead by US troops who apparently mistook them for insurgents. I am sure the thoughts of all members are with the families and friends of the dead.

Matt Wrack



## International meeting – value for money?

I read with interest the news item (*Firefighter*, September 2006, page 6) about the Assistant General Secretary's visit to Hawaii to organise with firefighter unions from the US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada to create an "International network of communication".

While I support all aspects of international solidarity I have to question certain aspects of this trip. We are currently under attack from all sides, LSI/CPD being one issue, Merseyside members fighting for their fire service, Regional Controls being forced through massive opposition. The list goes on.

I have to ask was it the correct decision to send the AGS at this time? Were any meetings with the employers cancelled to accommodate this. It also seems a very expensive way to send emails!

**Brian Burns**  
Gloucestershire

### A reply from Merseyside

The attendance of Assistant General Secretary, Andy Dark, at the conference in Hawaii proved to be of enormous benefit to members up here on Merseyside. At the height of our recent strike, we were handed a public relations coup that came about as a direct result of contact that was made between Andy Dark and the head of the New Zealand firefighters' union, Derek Best, at the Hawaii conference.

Derek Best informed Andy Dark that he had met with Merseyside's chief officer, Tony McGuirk, the previous year, and Mr McGuirk had made extremely injudicious remarks outlining how he planned to destroy the FBU on Merseyside. Of course, up until then, Mr McGuirk had always publicly denied that smashing the FBU

had ever been part of his agenda.

Mr McGuirk further revealed to Derek Best that the Merseyside fire authority was privately funding the legal cases of a handful of Merseyside FBU members who had been expelled for breaking union policy on co-responding and were subsequently challenging the union in the courts – a scandalous misuse of taxpayers' money.

All this was told to Andy Dark at the Hawaii conference and later confirmed by Derek Best in a written statement that was made available to the media.

I cannot tell you how valuable this public relations gift was for us. Merseyside firefighters on picket lines were visibly buoyed by witnessing the public humiliation of Mr McGuirk in this way. It is also worth pointing out that Andy Dark's raising of the Merseyside strike at the Hawaii conference led to a donation of \$10,000 to our strike fund from the American firefighters union. This shows how important it is to maintain international links with fellow trade unionists.

I'm sure much good came out of the Hawaii conference. As a leading player among international fire unions, it would have been rather embarrassing had the FBU seat been the only empty one at the table.

I believe the trip was money well spent. And I believe that for the boost it handed to Merseyside members alone, in the middle of an extremely tough industrial dispute, it was worth every penny.

**Kevin Hughes**  
Vice Chair  
Merseyside Brigade Committee  
(*The General Secretary asked Kevin Hughes to respond to Brian Burns' letter*)

■ The cost of the flight to the meeting was £1,600 not the £8,000 suggested by *The Sun*.

## This month



STEFAN ROUSSEAU/AP/EMPHICS

**16-23**  
The year in pictures

### Regulars

#### 4 NEWS

CPD: Executive considers campaign  
Co-responding: High Court dismisses authorities' case

#### 5 SOUNDING OFF!

Still to come

#### 7 FIFTH COLUMN

Dad's Army floundering in the shallow end

#### 8 AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

Unions must globalise too

#### 16 A YEAR IN PICTURES

A photographic record of some of the year's major issues and events

#### 24 WHAT DOES ... DO?

Union Learning Fund regional co-ordinator Andy Brickles

#### 26 HEALTH

Cholesterol and your heart

#### 27 LEGAL BEAGLE

School truancy and exclusion

#### 28 DAY OFF

Justin Thorn enjoys surfing in the North Sea

#### 30 PUZZLES

#### 31 STATION CAT

Brings you news they don't want you to hear

COVER PICTURES:  
PETER TURNLEY/CORBIS;  
ROB BRENNER; JOHN GILES/PA/EMPHICS

### Features

#### 10 CONTROLS: THERE IS A PLAN B

FBU's new plan for resilience controls using the existing control structure

#### 12 DYSLEXIA: A HIDDEN PROBLEM

Dyslexia need not be a bar to a firefighting career

#### 14 MERSEYSIDE DISPUTE

The FBU's longest strike since 1977 ended with significant advances for all members

### PUZZLES

**WIN**  
A TomTom ONE satnav  
see p30

Take part in our prize quiz and win a top quality satellite navigation unit. The TomTom ONE is easy to use. You can just plug in, switch on and go. Its slimline design makes it easy to take from car to car. It gives clear and accurate turn-by-turn voice instructions as well as showing the route with clear graphics on its anti-glare screen. The TomTom ONE will navigate you from postcode to postcode. It will also save your personal favourite destinations.



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## Firefighters petition Downing St

CUMBRIA

**K**endal firefighters and local FBU reps descended on No.10 Downing Street on 10 October to hand in a petition with 4,000 signatures from members of the public opposing proposed cuts to fire cover by Cumbria fire and rescue authority. With them was Westmorland and Lonsdale MP Tim Farron who is highly critical of the changes and helped to finance local petitioning.

Kendal firefighters doorstepped 12,000 local residents seeking their support for their campaign against cuts. The fire authority proposals include downgrading cover from Kendal fire station between 10pm and 10am, during the time when the most dangerous fires take place. As a result of these proposed changes, response times may increase from a current 5.5 minutes to up to 15 minutes.

A 12-week consultation period ended on 11 October but in recognition of the strength of opposition Cumbria's deputy chief fire officer said that he will accept comments on the proposals after that date.

The FBU's petition also remains live. As Firefighter went to press, the fire authority was due to decide on changes to fire cover at a cabinet meeting on 7 November and a full combined fire authority meeting on 14 November. The FBU was seeking to make a presentation at these meetings to put its case.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE WESTMORLAND GAZETTE

FBU Kendal branch secretary Richard Gibson with the Downing Street petition

## Lack of progress on professional development payments

CPD/LSI

**T**he FBU Executive Council (EC) will consider recommending a campaign for strike action, as well as pursuing legal options, at its meeting in December if satisfactory arrangements for continual professional development (CPD) payments replacing the long service increment (LSI) had not emerged out of ongoing negotiations with fire service employers by that time.

This decision was reached by the EC at a meeting on 24 October. It heard that no agreement had then been reached with employers.

Reporting on the position reached by the NJC joint CPD working group on 23 October, FBU negotiators told the EC that possible arrangements suggested by the employers were an improvement to their previous position statement, but that these improvements were neither sufficient nor

adequate.

The EC agreed to allow further discussions and negotiations to take place and a full report of them is to be made at the next meeting of the Executive Council at the beginning of December.

The Union remains committed to resolving this matter through negotiation. However, if agreement is not reached then the FBU's view will be that the employers have breached the 2003 pay and condi-





A firefighter and ambulance service paramedic work together at a road traffic accident

# High Court dismisses fire authorities' case

## CO-RESPONDING

A legal case brought by two fire authorities seeking to force firefighters to answer 999 medical emergencies on behalf of the ambulance service has been dismissed by the High Court. The FBU, a defendant in the case, welcomed the decision.

The case focused on whether firefighters could be required under their contracts of employment to participate in co-responder calls. It follows the attempted introduction of co-responder schemes at Retford Fire Station in Nottinghamshire and Grantham Fire Station in Lincolnshire.

The fire authorities argued that they had the right to assign additional duties – such as co-responding – to a firefighter in line with integrated risk management plans. They also claimed this had been agreed in the 2003 pay and conditions agreement.

But they failed to call any witnesses from the national employers who negotiated that agreement to support such a claim. They did not dispute the FBU evidence that there

was no intention to agree this and that the national employers knew that.

The FBU made clear the employers were free to raise the issue nationally if they wanted to try to reach agreement. In that way key issues such as training standards, funding and attendance targets could be properly addressed. Evidence was produced to confirm that, after delays by the national employers, national discussions were now ongoing at a ministerial advisory committee. Despite this clear evidence, these fire authorities tried to deny that there were any such discussions.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "We welcome the ruling. It's clear these two counties jumped the gun and tried to impose co-responding without national discussions, with no proper procedures and with no UK wide standards.

"Rather than being the solution, co-responding as it currently operates is part of the problem. We believe it is being used to mask and potentially worsen performance problems in the ambulance service.

## could trigger FBU strike campaign

tions agreement and the Union will need to consider how to react to this.

Large numbers of members have submitted grievance letters to their local management as a result of the local decision to reduce LSI without CPD being agreed or available.

The Union urged members and officials to continue to ensure that their local employers are made fully aware of the feelings of members on this issue.



Striking FBU members

## Sounding off!

**RICHARD ARTHUR**

partner, Thompsons Solicitors

### Age discrimination

New age discrimination regulations, which became law on 1 October, will outlaw working practices which put particular age groups of workers at a disadvantage.

However, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 are complex and will need to be tested in the employment tribunals.

Unlike sex and race discrimination, age discrimination is extremely difficult to define. We are all people of age. What is clear is that the regulations will force employers to review their employment practices.

The regulations apply to all workers and outlaw discrimination on grounds of age. There are four types of outlawed discrimination: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation. The regulations cover employment (including recruitment) and vocational training.

Direct discrimination occurs where someone is treated less favourably by another on the grounds of their age. This is most likely to happen in appointments and promotions – a candidate being considered "too old for the job", for example.

The onus in all age discrimination claims will be on the employer being able to justify their treatment of a candidate or employee on the grounds that it was necessary to achieve a legitimate business need.

Indirect discrimination is rather more difficult to define and prove. It occurs where, for example, an employer places a requirement on workers which puts those in a certain age group – younger or older – at a disadvantage.

This could include a requirement to undergo a physical fitness test, to have certain IT skills, or to have held a driving licence for a certain number of years. Again, the practice would have to be justified by the employer.

Proving indirect discrimination by means of identifying a comparator is itself difficult. What age of colleague does a 50-year-old pick to compare themselves with? Does a 21-year-old compare themselves with a 30 or 40-year-old?

Employers must also consider requests to work beyond retirement age and must go through a transparent process in doing so.

There are exemptions to the regulations. It will be legal to refuse to recruit people who are over the normal retirement age and to only recruit certain age groups where there is a genuine occupational requirement for employing people of a particular age.



The complex regulations on age discrimination will need to be tested at employment tribunals

# Union slams blanket response time plans

## NORFOLK

Norfolk's fire crews are warning that the decision of Norfolk County Council's cabinet to approve the fire service's new emergency response times to fires would allow a very high failure rate and lay the foundations for future cuts without further public consultation. Norfolk Fire Brigades Union also warned that more rural areas would be the first to be hit by the changes.

The proposals open the door to having fewer firefighters arriving later at 999 incidents and increasing the risk to the public and to firefighters. There is also a new response time of 45 minutes to non-emergency incidents although these incidents are not defined in any way.

The proposals include:

- A blanket target response time of 10 minutes across Norfolk which could leave residents in high risk areas like Norwich, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth waiting twice as long for the first fire

engine to arrive. At present they get a first engine arriving within five minutes and the second within eight minutes.

- A target allowing a one-in-five failure rate for responding to fires in the home. This would be accepting that firefighters would fail to properly respond to between eight and 10 serious fires a week. This is unacceptable.

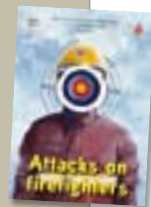
Neil Day, FBU Norfolk Brigade Secretary said: "We are meant to tailor our speed of response and number of firefighters responding according to the risks in any particular area. All this does is have a single response time across the whole of Norfolk without any thought being given to the risks in specific areas.

"Instead of bringing a more modern and sophisticated approach Norfolk is being presented with the crudest approach possible. It leaves significant potential for cuts in the areas where fire risk is greatest and a poorer service in the most rural areas."

## In brief

◆ A dispute has been resolved in Staffordshire after chief fire officer Alan Doig made significant amendments to proposals to change fire cover in the brigade. Thanks to a solid local FBU campaign, job security for wholetime and retained duty system (RDS) firefighters has been secured for three years as well as pay protection for RDS firefighters in stations losing the second appliance. Second appliances will now not be removed from Hanley, Newcastle, Burton-on-Trent and Stafford, while guarantees broadly in line with the old National Standards have been made on attendance times.

◆ The Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Bill, backed by the FBU, received its second reading in the House of Lords on October 13. The Bill seeks to extend the protection for emergency workers that has recently come into force in Scotland, making it a specific offence to obstruct or hinder emergency workers such as firefighters.



◆ The joint task group set up after the Buncefield fuel depot fire has called for immediate measures to increase safety at major petroleum storage facilities. Areas covered include pipeline transfers; tank overfill prevention – operating safety margins and level alarms; fire-safe shut-off valves and remotely operated shut-off valves; containment – bunds and other measures; and shift handovers.



◆ Arson is the fastest growing crime-related business insurance claim, according to the insurance company AXA's business crime index. The number of arson claim settlements increased by 12 per cent in the second quarter of 2006 compared to the first three months of the year. The average claim settlement for arson was around £40,000 and it accounted for around £4 in every £10 insurers paid out in crime related insurance claims.

## FBU condemns Radlett closure

### HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire firefighters have condemned the sudden closure of Radlett fire station on 23 October and urged the public to lobby councillors across the county to get the decision reversed.

Fire crews were given only a few hours' notice and the public were kept in the dark over the move.

The sudden closure came as a survival plan to keep the station open was near completion. No public statement was made and local councillors and the public were given no notice of the decision.

Tony Smith, Herts FBU vice-chair and station commander at Radlett, said: "Herts fire crews are shocked and appalled at the sudden closure. This is at a time when a survival plan for the station is nearing completion and is yet to be evaluated.

"It is disgraceful behaviour



Protesters against the closure

to throw fire crews out of their station at a couple of hours notice, displaying the worst excesses of the worst employers.

"Less than a year ago we were praised for our work at Buncefield by the very people who are now treating us like

this. This closure will have a knock-on effect because our work was not confined to the Radlett area.

"Crews from other stations will be stretched to fill the gap so the repercussions will be felt all around."

PIETÉ MILLSON

XAVIER LHOPE/REUTERS/CORBIS



In the pool – but are they properly qualified?



## FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

Over the past two and a half years under the guise of integrated risk management planning (IRMP) there have been attacks on the operational establishment figures in Lancashire, Incident Support Units (ISUs) have been withdrawn, the number of flexible duty officers available has been slashed, 100 jobs have gone, and morale has hit an all time low.

Then came the next bright idea: a review of the service training centre (STC).

The rationale was to replace dedicated, professional, existing training staff with a mixture of retired members of the service – a sort of Dad's Army of off duty staff and various other individuals.

In fact, anybody who would like to earn a spot of extra cash who the employers seem to consider hold the required qualifications, attributes and skills to deliver, monitor and *safely* instruct members of the public, international students and personnel employed by fire services from all over the country, including Lancashire. The aim: to save money.

What happened next? The review was agreed by the Combined Fire Authority, (CFA), despite serious concerns and reservations echoed throughout the consultation process by both STC staff and the FBU. Sixteen dedicated centre training staff posts were axed and a list of potential "part-time consultants" was generated.

At first it started as a trickle and then became a flood. The pool of "trainers" appeared from all corners of Lancashire and other locations. All had the misguided intention of ignoring agreed rates of (overtime) pay, as per our hard earned conditions of service, working overtime

### LANCASHIRE

### Pool trainers in at the shallow end

at the equivalent of straight pay. Please forgive them, for they know not what they do! The result?

■ One "consultant" falls down a shaft inside the centre's fire house while leading a team of BA wearers through the particular hazards in that part of the facility. To date this "consultant" is still off duty with injuries (and no benefits from the FBU's Accident and Injury Fund!).

■ "Consultants" have been turning up to carry out BA training duties without being qualified.

BA training duties without being qualified.

■ "Consultants" have been turning up on the day to see if there is any work for them, just like working the lump during the good old days in the building and dock industry.

■ "Consultants" (for various reasons) not being able to work the days to which they have committed themselves, leaving the centre short of staff and courses suffering.

■ "Consultants" turning up for training duties following busy night shifts and prior to going back onto night duty. *Very naughty.*

■ Confusion and concern throughout the STC – mainly from the dedicated and professional staff who work there as an occupational choice – as to where the centre is heading.

Where are we now? There are still a handful of misguided souls still "pooling". But thankfully most of the original volunteers have seen the light and withdrawn their services in favour of protecting our national conditions of service, allowing FBU officials to enter into constructive negotiations that will hopefully get us back on track.

Modernisation eh, you can't knock it?



# Same job, different place

**HAROLD SCHAITBERGER, GENERAL PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS**

“ Threats to labour and firefighters have the same ugly face in North America as they do in the United Kingdom and the South Pacific.

Attempts by simple-minded public officials who want to decimate pensions, cut wages and cut staffing are just as injurious in Canberra and Canterbury as they are in Auckland, Alberta and Alabama.

If corporations can globalise, taking advantage of cheap labour costs in one nation or the elimination of tariffs in another, unions can – and must – as well. If public officials can look beyond their borders for new ways to manage their emergency response and responders, and for new tactics to bust our unions, it time for us to do the same.

Firefighters, no matter their home country, share a common bond that comes with putting our lives on the line every day, and putting our lives in each other's hands, in the process.

Our unions share a similar bond. Individually, each of our unions has fought in our respective countries to ensure that the rights, safety and standard of living of our member firefighters was raised and protected.

But with the world shrinking because of instantaneous communications through the internet and satellites, it's time for us to establish a formal relationship in an attempt to improve the lives of firefighters across the world.

It's time for us to ignore the borders that separate our nations and form a new global alliance of firefighter unions.

Members of the International Association of Fire fighters (IAFF), representing US and Canadian professional firefighters and emergency medical services workers, the United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFUA), the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU), and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) of the UK christened just such an alliance in Hawaii July 25-27 after sharing experiences and finding that we all share common challenges and threats.

For our part, at our recent 48th biennial convention in Toronto, delegates

of the IAFF approved a resolution supporting the formation of a formal strategic alliance between our unions.

Our solidarity was on display during our convention when Derek Best, national secretary of the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union, and Peter Marshall, national secretary of the United Firefighters of Australia, gave fiery addresses to our delegates.

Following their speeches, IAFF convention delegates also passed a resolution supporting our brothers and sisters in the FBU, who were not able to attend because they made the correct decision to remain home while workers were on strike in Merseyside in protest over deep staffing cuts.

Together, as the UFUA, NZPFU and FBU get the support and approval of their memberships to move our alliance forward, we will soon form an historic union of fire unions that will be the foundation for a new way to interact with governments in our work to boost standards for emergency response and improve preparedness, safety and the living standards for firefighters worldwide.

This nascent global alliance will represent nearly 350,000 of the world's firefighters. We will use our combined resources to fight for better wages, benefits, pensions and health and safety regulations to protect members.

We will use our resources to seek improvements in staffing, training and equipment to help firefighters protect their communities.

We will use our resources to support each other. Even though we are separated by vast distances, we will no longer stand alone.

In fact, we must look beyond our own borders not just because social injustice threatens workers in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK. We must look beyond borders because terrorism has become a global threat.

Citizens in New York, suburban Washington DC, Toronto and London have felt that threat firsthand. Australians and New Zealanders were victimised by the 2002 Bali bombings that killed people from both those countries.

In light of the ever-present threat of terror attacks, we must have a unified approach to our preparedness.

When we met in Hawaii, our unions found many similarities in the threats firefighters face from their governments. Privatisation efforts and steps by public officials to cut costs threaten the safety of firefighters and the communities we pledge to protect.

Each union reported national deficiencies in the resources required to give firefighters the tools, training and personnel needed to respond safely and effectively to fires, natural disasters and terror attacks. In fact, it is obvious that none of the governments of the nations involved in the Alliance are providing adequate resources to protect firefighters or their citizens.

In the US we face annual attempts by our nation's arrogant, underachieving president to eliminate the Fire Act, the federal government's funding mechanism for the fire services.

We know we are not alone in facing hurdles erected by local and national public officials. We face common threats and we can address them more effectively through our global partnership.

While the daily efforts of firefighters will remain intensely local as we rush to the assistance of our neighbours, our organisations will begin to act on a broad, global scale.

Not only are we stronger together, we can grow much stronger. The four founding unions of the global alliance will invite other like-minded firefighter unions to join this partnership. And with a growing alliance will come growing strength and power for all firefighters.

The challenges our nations and members face are global. So is the solution – and with our alliance, so is our response.”

→ The IAFF represents 275,000 firefighters and paramedics in the United States and Canada. FBU Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark attended the Hawaii meeting of the global alliance in July 2006 and General Secretary Matt Wrack is attending a meeting hosted by UFUA and NZPFU in New Zealand in November.



## VIEW FROM THE AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

**'In light of the ever-present threat of  
terror attacks, we must have a unified  
approach to our preparedness'**

PICTURE: PETER TURNLEY/CORBIS



# Plan

The Government has rejected the FBU's alternative proposals for designated 'Resilience Controls' utilising the existing control structure. While we reject many of their criticisms, including the claim it would be more expensive, we are pleased to propose another variation

**T**his variation is based on a combination of the union's own proposals, the Government's Interim solution and part of the solution proposed under its plans for Regional Control Centres. This variation is very easy to cost, we know the key elements work and that the proposal is easily achievable in a much faster timescale than the Government's FireControl proposals which are now at least 3 years behind schedule.

The benefits of this variation – which we will call Plan B – include:

- Greater cost certainty for all the key elements
- Much cheaper, less than the £44 million the Government plans to spend on consultants alone for FireControl
- Much quicker to implement
- Far fewer risks
- All elements are fully proven

It is not a nationally networked solution. But as this is not being demanded of either the police or the ambulance controls – which also need to respond to the same major incidents – it can hardly be an absolute necessity for the fire service.

This variation would also utilise much of the detailed background work undertaken by the FireControl Project. Plan B is clearly another viable alternative to FireControl.

It once again undermines the Government

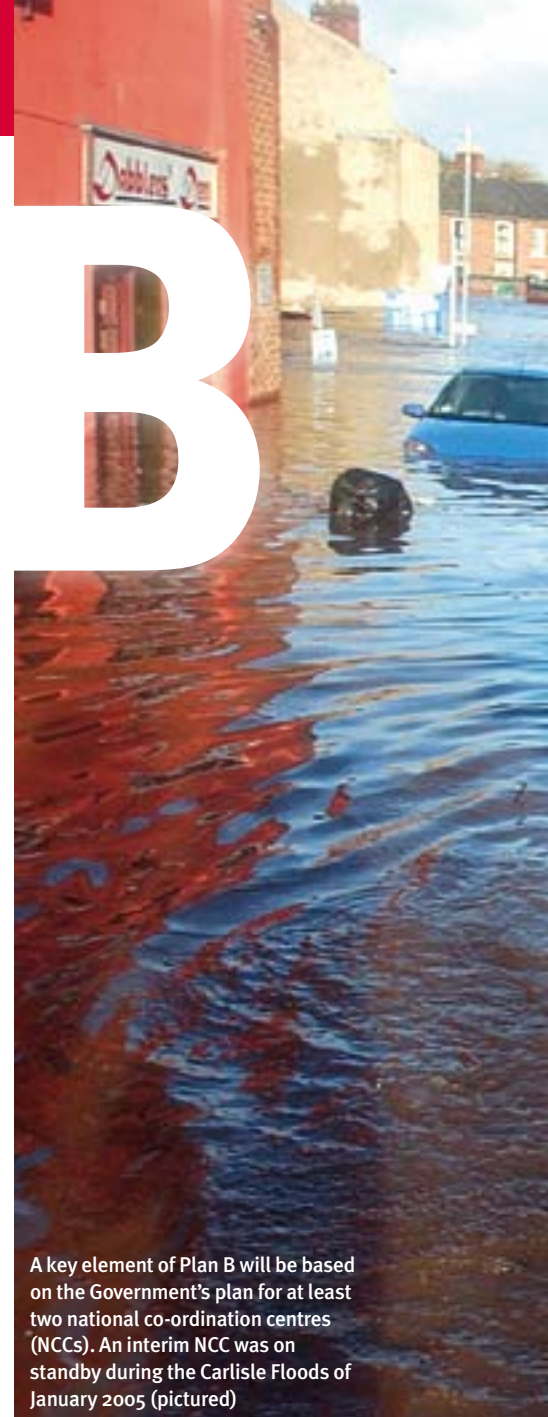
position that there is no alternative to their own proposals. We have already come up with two.

## Plan B

A union which represents personnel on the very frontline of dealing with major incidents recognises those personnel have a vested interest in ensuring an organised and planned response to major incidents including multiple, co-ordinated terrorist attacks whose aftermath may last for months. The ability to deal with such incidents also has to be balanced against the need to deal with the 'routine' emergencies which happen on a daily basis.

The key components of Plan B are the existing emergency fire control rooms, boosted by at least two National Co-ordination Centres (NCCs) – which are being promoted by the Government even under the FireControl project – and enhanced by upgrading technology in those control rooms the Government has identified as requiring it.

It is now clear the Regional Control Centres on their own cannot do what was originally intended and will be enhanced by at least two permanent NCCs based within regional controls. It is the same type of link as currently exists between the interim NCC which is based in the existing West Yorkshire control room.



A key element of Plan B will be based on the Government's plan for at least two national co-ordination centres (NCCs). An interim NCC was on standby during the Carlisle Floods of January 2005 (pictured)

The cost of this facility is around £90,000 a month, according to the Government's published figures. It has only been used once so far, to co-ordinate the response of the New Dimension equipment to Buncefield while the Herts control co-ordinated the rest of the brigade's assets in dealing with hundreds of other responses to emergencies. It was on standby to deal with the Carlisle floods and on standby if the attacks in London on 7 July had escalated.

## Key role

The Government describes the interim NCC as playing a "key role" in any co-ordinated national response to a major incident. The NCC has been widely praised by Government, is already fully operational and works very effectively alongside existing emergency fire controls.

Even if the proposals for regional controls go ahead, the Government now belatedly





JOHN GILES/PA/EMPICS

#### BENEFITS OF PLAN B

**Greater cost certainty for all the key elements**  
**Much cheaper, less than the £44 million the Government plans to spend on consultants alone for FireControl**  
**Much quicker to implement**  
**Far fewer risks**  
**All elements are fully proven**

accepts that at least two of these National Co-ordinating Centres will also be needed. FireControl Project Fire and Rescue Service (England) Concept of Operations for Regional Control Centres (page 18 paragraph 66), DCLoG 27 June 2006 states: "One or more of the RCCs will house a National Co-ordination Centre (NCC), which will co-ordinate the response to major incidents (including requesting the mobilisation of New Dimension assets via their Home RCC). The role of the NCC is still under consideration, based on experience of operating the Interim NCC hosted by West Yorkshire FRS."

The same commitment has been made in the Government's response to the Select Committee report. The cost difference between what the union is proposing (2 NCCs) and what the Government is proposing (2 NCCs) is therefore nil.

Getting reliable information on the number of existing controls which need tech-

nology upgrading is difficult. Let us assume that 20 controls need such an upgrading.

Specific experience shows the last upgrading to a Fortek system in Merseyside (highly praised by Government) came in under budget at a little over £650,000. That is in one of the largest brigades in the country. To upgrade 20 controls would involve costs totalling between £13 million at the bottom end and around £20 million at the top end, far less than FireControl will spend on consultants.

#### Major incidents

It would not be a homogenous networked system which will make it more resilient and much more responsive to the requirements of local brigades. The need for a networked system is being over-stated as neither the police nor ambulance plan to network their systems and they are as involved as the fire service in responding to major incidents. They do not see the lack of networked systems

as being a weakness.

The FireControl Project is not even scheduled to be completed until around 2012, 11 years after 9/11. We need the maximum achievable resilience now, not in 2012 or beyond.

**STOP PRESS:** As *Firefighter* went to press, the Government slipped out the revised Business Case for FireControl. Despite 3 years of mitigation work and £20 million in consultancy fees the project now has greater risk attached to it than it did 2 years ago. Many of the key costs are left out including the huge rental costs of the new buildings which the FBU estimates to be a total of £360 million over the period of the contract. This overwhelms the cost of the IT which the Government estimates to be around £160 million. The estimated cost of upgrading existing controls is around £500,000 for each of those controls which need it.

More details will follow.

Nobody knows how many people with undiagnosed dyslexia work in the fire service, with many firefighters struggling under mounting paperwork. The good news is that attitudes to the disability are changing, helped by new legislation

**D**o you want the chance to fill in lots of forms and write reports at work? Then firefighting could be just the job ...

It's an unlikely job advert and one we're not likely to see. But filling in forms and writing reports is very much part of the job these days, even for frontline firefighters. However, this should not deter people with dyslexia from applying if they have the strengths and qualities needed to fight fires and respond to other emergencies. And the law is on their side.

Firefighters are no longer exempt from the Disability Discrimination Act, there to ensure all candidates get a fair chance in the recruitment process, and "reasonable adjustments" once appointed. It also means fire brigades need no longer miss out on talented would be recruits.

Take Andrea Johnson, accomplished horsewoman and former class 1 lorry driver. She tried to get into the West Midlands fire service nearly a decade ago. "I kept failing the written test because I needed more time," says Andrea, now 36. This was before the DDA covered firefighters, but Andrea didn't give up her ambition. Now, aged 36, she is thriving on Blue Watch at Tamworth station, after Staffordshire Fire and Rescue selected her for training from stiff competition earlier this year.

Dyslexia is considered to be a disability, and candidates are encouraged to disclose it at the start of the recruitment process, along with a report detailing its effects. Employers will then make "reasonable adjustments" at the relevant stages of the selection process, such as extra time for written tests.

Dyslexia is often known as the "hidden disability". Andrea left school without qualifications and was not formally diagnosed until many years later. In her late twenties she took herself off to night school to get help

Filling in forms and writing reports is very much part of the job these days but this should not deter dyslexics from applying

Dyslexia  
Attitudes  
problems

with literacy. A tutor thought she might have dyslexia, she took some tests and learned she had above average intelligence and was also dyslexic. She heard Staffordshire was recruiting, disclosed her condition when she applied and hasn't looked back.

#### Important to speak out

There were "reasonable adjustments" in the selection process and also on the training course, where Andrea was given extra time in tests and sometimes answered questions orally instead of writing them down. She loves her job and is getting more confident in writing up reports. She believes it's important to speak out to encourage others who may have the condition not to be deterred from applying. She is also keen to encourage any serving firefighters who may be struggling with form-filling and report writing to get tested for dyslexia so they can benefit from support if it is confirmed.

No-one knows how many undiagnosed dyslexics there are in the fire service. Firefighter has spoken to a number of FBU members who have the condition when researching this article, and it can affect all ranks.

We found a lot of support for the DDA and a belief that the condition no longer carries the stigma it did with some in the past, though disclosing is not always easy.

Academics and psychologists have identified that having dyslexia certainly doesn't mean a person has low intelligence. In fact, many dyslexics are adept at disguising the



# dyslexia problem?

extent of their condition and devise coping strategies that would astound most people.

Lack of a diagnosis can cause needless anxiety and lack of self-esteem and crass handling of disclosure by a line manager can make matters worse. However, even those who had had negative experiences would encourage others to get a diagnosis.

One retained firefighter with a decade's service would encourage other people to disclose, even though he hasn't felt particularly supported. "My advice is just get on with it, though now they've brought in these individual performance reviews it means there's far more paperwork just to show you are competent as a firefighter. My line manager knows about it

Employers now  
say we have a duty  
of care, and more  
people realise  
dyslexic certainly  
doesn't mean stupid

## DYSLEXIA: THE FACTS

**What is dyslexia?** Dyslexia is commonly understood to be a term covering a range of types of learning difficulty where someone of normal intelligence has persistent and significant problems with reading, writing, spelling.

**What are the symptoms?** Dyslexic symptoms include poor reading, spelling and handwriting but can also cover wider problems with concentration and co-ordination.

**Who is affected?** Up to six million Britons are believed to have dyslexia. 4% of the population is severely dyslexic and a further 6% have limited problems.

Source: BBC

now, but no-one's come to me suggesting I get extra time, as I have to write it all out first before I put it into a computer. It would certainly help, particularly as I'm only in one day a week. The station commander knows about it and has made sympathetic noises, but it's got to be done so I just get on with it."

Another firefighter benefited from his dyslexia diagnosis when he had extra time while going for promotion. "I came out as a dyslexic quite blatantly because it was the only way I was going to get any help when I was invited to go for promotion. They made reasonable adjustments for me and I got extra time. If you can't go to your line manager, go to human resources. That's what I did. Things are getting better – employers now say we have a duty of care, and more people realise dyslexic certainly doesn't mean stupid."

## High-flying career

A glance at Pete Goulden's track record shows that dyslexia is no bar to a high-flying career. The Burton-on-Trent firefighter, who is also FBU health and safety rep for the West Midlands (Region 7), is currently on secondment to a government department. Pete, a specialist in New Dimension equipment, is carrying out risk assessments and creating safe systems of work for the Department of Communities and Local Government. Pete's dyslexia wasn't picked up when he was at school in the seventies, where teachers thought he was "a bit stupid." He was a retained firefighter, and his dyslexia was discovered when he was trying to apply for wholetime jobs in his late twenties. This was before the DDA, but Pete was encouraged and supported by the station officer at Cannock. "I was fortunate that someone was willing to help. To me, it's all about being honest with yourself.

His advice to fellow dyslexics? "Recognise you've got an issue and don't try to hide it. There are lots of tools out there that can help – I use a hand-held computer with Word that's no bigger than a mobile phone. It is possible to produce good documents without being able to spell well."

Pete, who has written articles on New Dimension for *Firefighter*, is not only a specialist but could also be an inspiration to others. Though few firefighters join the brigade with an ambition to write reports, he is living proof that dyslexia need not necessarily be a bar to doing it exceedingly well.

→ Dyslexia Action [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk)  
Email: [info@dyslexiaaction.org.uk](mailto:info@dyslexiaaction.org.uk)  
Free courses for parents and adult learners start this autumn in centres around the country.  
→ British Dyslexia Association, 98 London Road, Reading, RG1 5AU Helpline: 0118 966 8271  
[www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)

# DETERMINED ACTION GETS RESULTS

It turned out to be the longest strike in the fire service since the 1977 dispute. And while confined to just one brigade, the Merseyside dispute highlighted issues of national significance. Senior managers led an unprecedented attack on the FBU but also on the very principle of being able to join a union and to take strike action, if necessary, as a last resort. It was naked anti-trade unionism, a throwback to the Thatcher years.

Yet efforts to persuade employees to break strike action met with limited success. Through the 28 days of strike action a membership who started determined only got stronger. Negotiations were complex, protracted – and frustrated by what the local Union firmly believed was a strategy to prolong the dispute in an attempt to test the mettle of the Merseyside membership. This strategy palpably failed.

The press war was quickly won and the public support quickly secured. This left a battleground around fire cover, jobs and conditions of service

that always felt comfortable for the Merseyside membership. But coming after a sustained period of provocative, intimidatory and confrontational management style, the dispute would inevitably prove to be protracted.

In the eventual agreement that resolved the dispute, we didn't just stave off attacks. There were a number of key areas where the FBU have made significant advances for all members – wholetime, retained and control (see box for details). Arguably the most important achievement was a review into industrial relations within Merseyside, opposed so vehemently by MF&RS management.

The FBU needs to draw its own lessons from this dispute, as will employers. But the most important one for us must be that the only way the FBU membership can defeat determined employers is by taking determined action. And if that means taking prolonged and sustained strike action, then so be it.

**Les Skarratts, FBU Brigade Secretary, Merseyside**

## AGREEMENT IN BRIEF

- Fire cover protected
- Clear agreement on future recruitment strategy
- Minimum staffing levels of five and four on two-pump stations, five on a one-pump station
- Protection for control staff with intensive reviews built in for further protection
- Recognition by elected members for first time of vital work control staff carry out
- Clear and agreed definition of the term Low Level of Activity and Risk (LLAR), a reference point for day crewing system
- Clear definition of overtime and part-time working; work additional to 42 hours tied into NJC role maps and paid as such
- Review into industrial relations within Merseyside

### 21 JULY

FBU announces it is to ballot Merseyside members over plans to cut 120 emergency response firefighter posts – one in ten of the workforce – 15 emergency fire control operator posts and four fire engines at night time. There will be fewer rescue appliances, fewer firefighters on fire engines and a longer wait for crews to arrive to all 999 emergencies. The loss of one in ten fulltime firefighter posts – in addition to the 68 posts lost last year – will inevitably damage the overall operational capability of the Merseyside fire and rescue service.

### 7 AUGUST

Official figures release by the Government in response to a parliamentary question posed by an MP on behalf of the FBU shows a 118% rise in the number of local firefighters injured at emergency incidents in the last three years, the worst record in the fire service. The FBU says this justifies their concerns for firefighter safety in the face of demands by senior managers for a further cut of 120 firefighters.

### 21 AUGUST

Merseyside fire crews vote THREE to ONE (71.4%, Yes and 28.6%, No) in favour of strike action. Four days of strike action are named – from 10.00 am Thursday 31 August to 10.00 am, Monday 4 September.

### 31 AUGUST

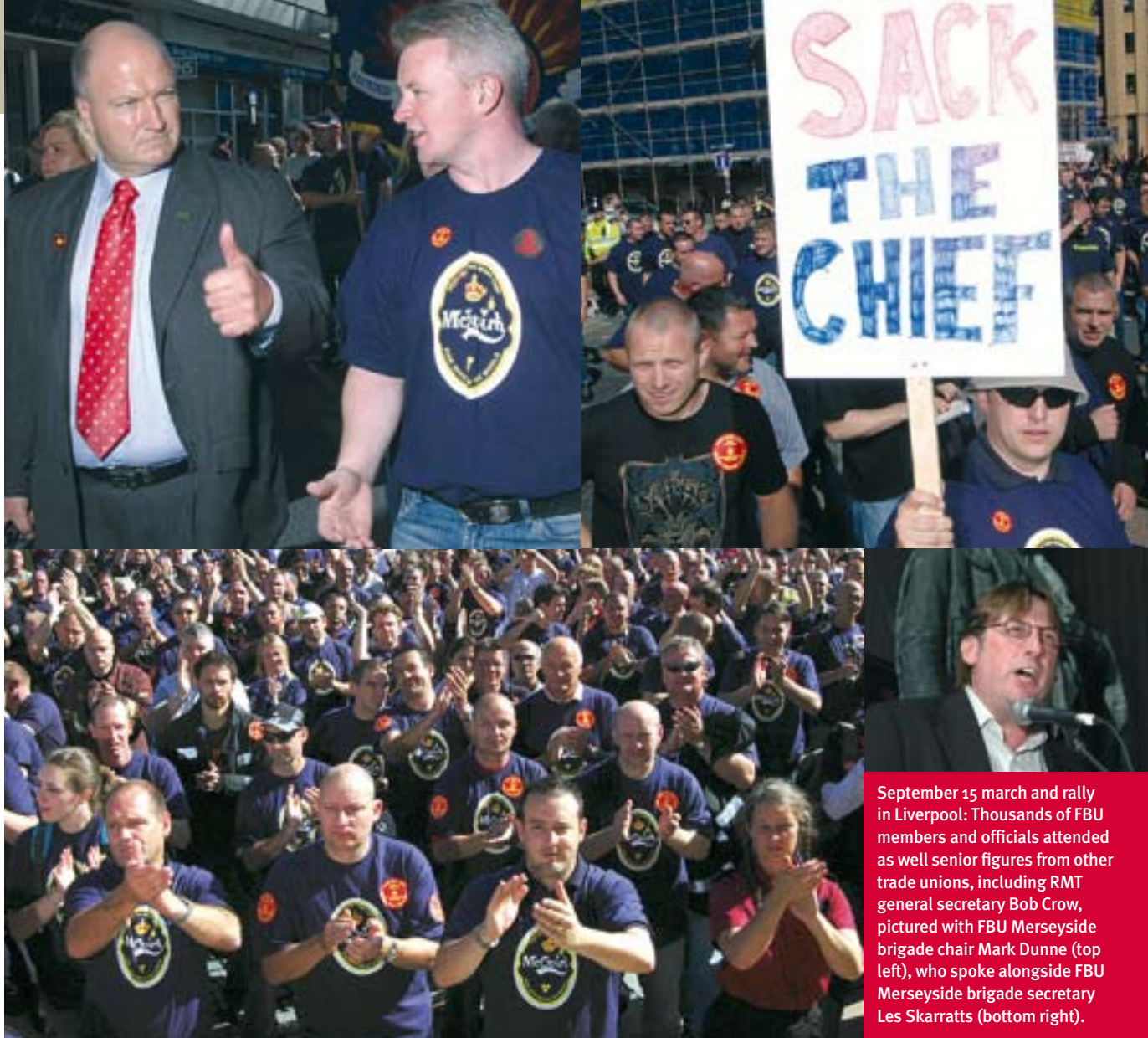
North West fire crews from the brigades which directly border Merseyside give assurances by their Chief Fire Officers that fire crews and equipment from those brigades will not be deployed into Merseyside during periods of strike action. The exceptions are 'border' areas with long-standing mutual assistance agreements which already provide for a joint response and in the event of a catastrophic incident such as a terrorist attack.

### 4-6 SEPTEMBER

Fire authority claims that National Fire Service Employers are reluctant to assist in seeking a resolution to the Merseyside dispute and talks. The FBU rejects this. FBU attacks fire authority calls for talks to resolve the dispute. This is because they are delayed by five days to start on 11 September on the eve of eight days of strike action. Further strikes announced the previous day following the stalling of talks.







September 15 march and rally in Liverpool: Thousands of FBU members and officials attended as well as senior figures from other trade unions, including RMT general secretary Bob Crow, pictured with FBU Merseyside brigade chair Mark Dunne (top left), who spoke alongside FBU Merseyside brigade secretary Les Skarratts (bottom right).

#### 13-15 SEPTEMBER

March and rally in Liverpool takes place with members/officials attending from across the UK with speakers including Matt Wrack and three other trade union general secretaries: Bob Crow (RMT), Billy Hayes (CWU); Tony Woodley (TGWU). Union announces further strikes – two four-day blocks running back to back, from 10am, 20 September-10am, 28 September. TUC Congress in Brighton passes emergency motion on Merseyside dispute. Union says FBU member suspended by the fire authority and accused of making a number of phone calls to strike breakers was wrongly accused.

#### 20 SEPTEMBER

More strike dates announced (10.00am, 28 September – 10.00am, 2 October and 10.00, 2 October – 10.00am, 6 October) as senior managers continue to drag their feet on talks, despite calls from councillors for 'immediate talks' to proceed. Three weeks after positive talks looked like they might be going somewhere, senior management still haven't made any firm proposals that amount to an offer, let alone proposals that are acceptable to FBU members.

#### 4-6 OCTOBER

Agreement in principle is reached between FBU and the fire authority. Detailed negotiations to take place over the following three weeks. The FBU gets daily reports of a significant number of incidents of bullying, harassment and intimidation of those who were on strike and says this is undermining talks. This is so widespread that it appears to be orchestrated and is clearly undermining the talks process which is at a very delicate stage.

#### 19 OCT

Union calls for Merseyside Fire Authority to investigate the source of website postings detailing the content of national talks aimed at settling the Merseyside dispute and for the suspension of chief fire officer Tony McGuirk while the investigation proceeds. The union says the content, timing and source of the postings points to the possibility that Mr McGuirk, who was at the hotel in London where the talks were taking place, was directly involved.

#### 23-24 OCTOBER

Merseyside dispute officially ends with a positive outcome on fire cover, future recruitment and ridership levels as well as protection for control staff jobs (see page 14 for more details). Agreement is also reached on a review into industrial relations. The dispute, which involved the longest strike in the fire service since the 1977 national fire strike with 28 days of strikes, is the third official strike action in Merseyside in the last 11 years.

# 2006

## **A YEAR IN PICTURES**

For this end-of-year Firefighter, we publish photographs illustrating some key events and issues for the union





The Buncefield oil depot fire of December 2005 in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, continued to have repercussions throughout 2006

PICTURE: CHRIS RADBURN/PA/EMPICS





## HERTFORDSHIRE: TOUGH FIGHT

Hertfordshire FBU members (seen above demonstrating at Downing Street and right with supporters) voted by 8:1 in a ballot in May in favour of strike action over proposed cuts that would close the retained stations of Bovingdon and Radlett and dramatically reduce the cover at Watford and Royston. Firefighter posts would also be lost at Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage and St Albans. On 18 July, after concerted strike action and tough negotiations, FBU members returned to work. An agreement was reached that saw the reversal of many of the cuts, although councillors remained determined to close Bovingdon and Radlett fire stations. The deal included a new written assurance of no more cuts to frontline fire crews, frontline fire appliances or fire station closures for at least three years. A new recruitment drive to employ 39 new firefighters is now under way to redress frontline staffing shortfalls across the county.







September: Colombian senator Gloria Ramirez, a former trade union leader, gives her support to striking Merseyside firefighters at St Helens. She had been lobbying the Labour Party on UK military support for the Colombian regime

## MERSEYSIDE: UNION-BUSTING

The Merseyside fire strike was the longest since the 1997 national dispute. It came in response to the fire authority's proposals to axe 120 emergency response firefighter posts – one in ten of the workforce – 15 emergency fire control operator posts and four fire engines at night time. The loss of one in ten fulltime firefighter posts – in addition to the 68 posts lost last year – would have inevitably damaged the overall operational capability of the Merseyside fire and rescue service. There was another reason the dispute also stood out: the anti-union agenda of leading management figures such as Tony McGuirk. The Merseyside fire chief is pictured below enjoying a drink and a chat at the four star Bosworth House Hotel in Market Bosworth, Warwickshire while a crunch fire authority meeting aimed at ending the dispute was taking place in Merseyside in October.



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



ROB BRENNER



### BUNCEFIELD: FALLOUT

Issues surrounding the fire and explosion at the Buncefield Oil Depot in Hemel Hempstead, on 11 December 2005, rumbled on throughout the year. The demand for a public inquiry into the largest peacetime fire in Europe was rejected by the Government. In July, a report by the Buncefield Major Incident Investigation Board identified failures in design and operation of storage sites, flagged up “fundamental questions about residential and commercial developments around sites like Buncefield” but was “very impressed with the emergency response to the incident”. Buncefield also became symbolic of the cuts plan of Hertfordshire fire service as all of the losses were to be of firefighters and equipment at stations which were the first to respond to the fire.



HERTFORDSHIRE POLICE/PA/EMPGCS



LETERIS PITRAKIS/AP/EMPGCS

Above: Flames and smoke rise from the Buncefield oil depot on the day of the explosion  
Right: Firefighters walk from the area of the fire to take a break after helping to tackle the blaze more than 48 hours after it began

### REGIONAL CONTROLS

The Government's plans for regional controls were heavily criticised by a cross-party House of Commons Select Committee. Its report in July outlined severe concerns across the fire service, something Government had always been at pains to deny. A constant theme of the report, based on evidence from ministers and civil servants as well as fire service specialists, was that the Government could provide no evidence to back its claims for regional controls, an issue the FBU had been highlighting for more than three years. The committee said it was “unconvinced that the Government can offer the assurance of maintained or improved service quality resulting from the FiReControl project and there is clearly widespread doubt across the FRS.” The committee made it clear that a simple assurance was not enough. It needed to be backed up with “evidence” which it asked the Government to provide “immediately”. Claims of savings and greater efficiency – central justifications behind the project – were torn to shreds by the committee.





STEFAN ROUSSEAU/AP/EMPICS



## THE YEAR IN PICTURES

### PUBLIC SERVICES

The FBU joined 14 other trade unions to back the 'Public Services Not Private Profit' campaign. A rally – at which FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack (right) spoke – and a mass lobby of Parliament were held on 27 June. A focus of the campaign is the House of Commons early day motion EDM 1940, signed by more than 80 MPs. John McDonnell, Secretary to the FBU Parliamentary Group, is a leading player in the campaign.



### BETHNAL GREEN INQUEST

The inquest into the deaths of two London FBU members while attending a shop fire in Bethnal Green, east London, (above) in July 2004 concluded that Bill Faust and Adam Meere died due to basic failures by London Fire Brigade, including failure to provide BA communications, failure to provide adequate water and ventilating the building while the two firefighters were inside fighting fire in the basement. Coroner Andrew Reid paid tribute to the bravery of firefighters who risked everything to save their colleagues by going back into the building and said he would be writing to the relevant authorities urging that the accident investigator's recommendations be followed up to prevent more deaths. The FBU represented the families of Bill and Adam at the inquest.





ANDREW WIARD

## RETAINED PENSIONS

The House of Lords in March backed retained firefighters battling for equal pension and sick pay rights. The landmark decision paves the way for retained firefighters in fire and rescue services across the UK to have access to the Firefighters Pension Scheme. The Law Lords (some of whom are pictured, right) upheld the appeal brought by the FBU in relation to rights for over 15,000 firefighters working the retained duty system in the UK. The Law Lords said that retained and whole-time firefighters are employed on the same type of contract.

The Law Lords ruled that the Employment Tribunal that rejected the Fire Brigade Union's case had focused too much on differences rather than similarities between whole-time and retained duty contracts. The decision means that tens of thousands of part-time workers will be able to use the new part-time workers regulations to compare their work with that of full-time colleagues.



PA/EMPICS



# WHAT DOES A ULF REGIONAL CO-ORDINATOR DO?

Andy Brickles is spreading the message that it's never too late to reap the rewards of lifelong learning

**A**ndy Brickles has held a raft of lay union posts in his firefighting career – branch official, brigade secretary and regional chair in the East Midlands. So he is well equipped for the challenging role of a Union Learning Fund regional co-ordinator – and fired up to carry on spreading the message that it's never too late to reap the rewards of lifelong learning.

The FBU's Union Learning Fund project has been running for over two years – along with the Scottish ULF and the Northern Ireland ULF – and is providing another benefit for union members. Over 250 union learning reps have been trained and members have taken more than 4,000 learndirect courses at FBU learning centres.

ULF regional co-ordinators are key players, supporting learning reps and working with brigades and local colleges to provide the kind of learning that best suits members' needs. Co-ordinators need to be multi-skilled themselves – keen on outreach and responding to members' suggestions and coming up with innovative schemes that can whet appetites for learning and be accessed at work without too much hassle.

In the East Midlands, Andy, along with learning reps, has carried out surveys to identify what is wanted and then set about finding how best to provide it. "It's really taken off here," he says. "We've had a lot of interest, recruited some fantastic union learning reps and had some tremendous successes. I would encourage any of our members who are interested in learning and helping others to become a union learning rep." Everyone who works for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service – uniformed whole time, retained and officers plus cooks, cleaners and office workers – will now have the chance to work towards an Open College Network ICT qualification, clocking up credits by working through modules delivered in work time.

## Visiting stations

Andy and colleagues from Unison worked with Notts fire and rescue management and South Notts College to come up with a bespoke ICT package. Around 1,000 employees stand to benefit and they won't even have to travel. Tutors equipped with laptops are visiting stations and other workplaces where they deliver four three-hour long

Andy Brickles: 'We've had a lot of interest, recruited some fantastic union learning reps and had some tremendous successes'

sessions, so staff can beef up their ICT skills, and gain an Open College Network qualification. In a trailblazing deal, Andy is involved in talks to secure retained firefighters 12 hours overtime for taking the course, bankrolled by Notts fire and rescue. It is a template other regions could follow.

Life outside work is viewed as important too. Basic French conversation is proving popular with some Notts FBU members who should have no trouble ordering their drink and cheesy nibbles in French at the end-of-course cheese and wine.

The East Midlands covers five counties and there have been a couple of ICT pilots in Derbyshire. French and Spanish classes are imminent. In Northamptonshire, there are plans to roll out ICT courses after Christmas and negotiations are already in train. The county has been picked as one of the pilot areas for specialist e-learning courses delivered online from the national training centre at Moreton-in-Marsh, as part of a £500,000 government-funded initiative.

"People have to be proficient in basic IT

PICTURES: JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Andy Brickles talks to firefighters at Aston Park station





to study this way,” says Andy. His work has also led to three learning agreements between the FBU and management in the region that ensure learning and development is an integral part of consultation and negotiation.

The ULF also provides a means for members who may have problems with literacy or life skills, but have still managed to do their job, and more than 30 firefighters in the region have received help after their needs were identified. The East Midlands region has started its second two-year stint running ULF projects – the first was delayed by the national pay dispute. So far, over 700 firefighters in the region have benefited and, with the way things are looking, e-learning and lifelong learning – not to mention French classes – seem set to be part of life for a growing number of firefighters. And not, of course, just those in the East Midlands.

➔ Interested in learning and helping others? Become a union learning rep. Just contact your regional ULF co-ordinator for more information. Visit <http://ulf.fbu.org.uk/> for more contact details and more information on the FBU ULF.

### FBU ULF IN NUMBERS

- ◆ 4,000 – learndirect courses
- ◆ 1,000 – members who have been helped source learning opportunities in ICT, presentation skills, foreign languages, digital photography
- ◆ 1,000 – dissemination events
- ◆ 700 – members and their families who attained qualifications in a range of subjects
- ◆ 250 – trained union learning reps
- ◆ 250 – members who have attained qualifications in national numeracy and literacy tests (level 2)
- ◆ 10 – percentage reduction for Open University courses for members
- ◆ 10 – laptops as well as a
- ◆ 1 – mobile learning vehicle carrying 10 laptops and an interactive whiteboard system allowing learning to be delivered to RDS firefighters

## Working For You

### JULIE SMALL

Fairness at Work Officer

### Fife



DAVID ATHERFOLD

Julie Small and her colleague Laura Turner are fighting for a fairer maternity deal for women firefighters in Fife. Julie is Fife's FBU's fairness at work officer and Laura is the FBU women's rep. Both sit on the Scottish Women's Committee, where Julie has the special responsibility for maternity issues.

When Julie Small discovered that women firefighters in Fife were getting a raw deal when on maternity leave, she was surprised and outraged. Fife firefighters get the first six weeks pay at 90 per cent of their earnings and, where a woman declares her intention to return to work following maternity leave, she will be entitled to a further 12 weeks at half pay topped up by statutory maternity pay (SMP) and for the remaining eight weeks she will receive SMP which is capped at £108.85 a week.

All UK fire service employers have to pay at least this as it is the rate set out in the Grey Book. But some pay more for longer and the FBU maternity policy has an “aspirational rate” of six months full maternity pay for all women on ordinary maternity leave (OML).

In Fife, and in many other fire and rescue services, women stand to lose money when they have a baby and take their legal entitlement to maternity leave, Julie says. An improved rate for maternity pay would not only give women what they deserve but help to recruit and retain more women firefighters.

Julie was an officer in the Ministry of Defence police when she had her daughter 16 years ago – and got full pay for the six months she was off. But you need not look any further than nearby Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service for a better deal. There, women on maternity leave receive full pay for 14 weeks. “Women firefighters thinking of starting a family could well choose to go for the brigade that offers them the best maternity pay deal,” says Julie, who points out that the number of women firefighters employed in Fife is lower than in Lothian and Borders.

# Hearty eating

A few seasonal lapses aside, watch what you eat!

## CHOLESTEROL

**C**hristmas and New Year are a fun time of year. Most of us indulge a bit. And there's no harm in that if you know that throughout most of the year you follow a heart-healthy diet. But despite greater awareness of nutritious foods, most people in the UK still have levels of cholesterol that are too high and this can increase the risk of getting coronary heart disease.

Cholesterol is essential for life. It is made in the liver and is a building block of every cell wall in the body. It is also involved in the production of important chemicals required by the body.

But a typical Western diet is high in saturated fat and the liver makes cholesterol from the saturated fat in our food. The excess cholesterol made by the liver is deposited on the inner lining of the arteries that supply both the heart and the brain with oxygen. This process, called atherosclerosis, builds up silently for years and reduces the rate at which blood can be delivered to the heart and the brain. Ultimately, this may lead to a heart attack or a stroke, particularly if there are other risk factors involved, such as high blood pressure or smoking (see box).

Some risk factors like advancing age, gender and close relatives with coronary heart disease early in life cannot be changed.

### What can I do to reduce my cholesterol?

- ◆ Follow a cholesterol-lowering diet that is low in saturated fat, e.g. butter, animal products and full fat dairy foods, and high in poly or monounsaturated fat, e.g. olive oil.
- ◆ Try to eat oily fish 2-3 times a week.
- ◆ Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- ◆ Restrict your salt intake.
- ◆ Make sure most of your energy comes

### RISK FACTORS

- ◆ High blood pressure
- ◆ Diabetes
- ◆ Smoking
- ◆ Obesity
- ◆ Inactivity
- ◆ Excessive alcohol
- ◆ Excessive stress

- ◆ Try to avoid prolonged periods of stress.
- ◆ Try to find time for relaxation by doing a daily activity that you enjoy.

### Who can I go to for help?

An increased level of cholesterol does not show any symptoms, but if you are concerned do speak to your GP who will be able to assess your individual risk of developing coronary heart disease.

H-E-A-R-T UK The Cholesterol Charity offers advice and support to anyone who is concerned about their cholesterol. It provides a telephone helpline service staffed by nurses and dietitians who have plenty of time to talk and listen.

H-E-A-R-T UK also aims to identify the 1 in 500 people in the UK who have inherited high cholesterol, known as familial hypercholesterolaemia or FH. This disorder increases the risk of developing coronary heart disease to the point where the first symptom is a heart attack suffered at a very young age, sometimes the twenties. There is a 50 per cent chance of this disorder being passed on to the children of a person with FH. H-E-A-R-T UK wants to break the deadly round of preventable heart attacks and strokes affecting young families by raising awareness of this silent disease.

### How can I help?

At H-E-A-R-T UK we rely heavily on voluntary income to continue our work supporting all those at risk of inherited high cholesterol and heart disease.

You could take part in a sponsored event, create your own fundraising event, or buy our Christmas cards and gifts.

→ If you want any more information about cholesterol or you think that you may be able to help H-E-A-R-T UK in any way then we want to hear from you.

Website – [www.heartuk.org.uk](http://www.heartuk.org.uk)

Email – [ask@heartuk.org.uk](mailto:ask@heartuk.org.uk)

Telephone Helpline – 01628 628 638



There is no harm in a little indulgence if you follow a heart-healthy diet throughout most of the year

- from starchy foods such as cereals, rice, pasta and bread.
- ◆ Be a healthy weight for your height and watch your waist measurement! It should be less than 94cm in men and less than 80cm in women
- ◆ Be physically active. Aim for at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise per day.
- ◆ Do not smoke.
- ◆ Aim for no more than 21 units of alcohol per week if you are a man or 14 units if you are a woman.



## Education exclusion

**Q** My child has been excluded from her school. What can I do about it?

**A** When children misbehave at school there are certain options that can be exercised to remove them. This could be suspension (temporary exclusion) for a fixed period or permanent exclusion where the pupil has been told s/he may no longer attend that school because of a serious breach of discipline or continual disruptive behaviour.

A pupil can also be excluded for bad behaviour outside school while on a school trip and also bad behaviour on the journey to or from school. Exclusion should not be used if there are possible alternatives and only the headteacher can exclude a pupil.

A parent or guardian should discuss the matter with the headteacher first then write to the chair of the governing body to make representations against the exclusion, to try and show why the exclusion is unreasonable.

If a pupil has been permanently excluded and the governing body agrees that s/he should not be reinstated parents have a right to appeal to a panel before the fifteenth school day after the day on which notice of exclusion in writing was received.

The appeal must be made in writing giving grounds for the appeal. There will be a hearing which the parent has the right to attend.

If, after an appeal, the child is not reinstated the local education authority (LEA) has a duty to provide the pupil with other suitable education, possibly in another school. But a pupil who has been permanently excluded from two or more schools loses her/his automatic right to a school place, although the LEA's duty still exists.

If the LEA cannot fulfil its duty to provide an excluded child with a place in another school, it may provide a place in a pupil referral unit. If this fails it may provide home or individual tuition.

**Education Otherwise**  
0870 730 0074  
[www.education-otherwise.org](http://www.education-otherwise.org)  
Education Otherwise gives support and information on home-based education

## Truancy and jail

**Q** My child just won't go to school. I've heard I can be jailed for this. Is this true?

**A** Under the Education Act 1996 it is a legal requirement for the parent/guardian of every child of compulsory school age to be responsible for ensuring that they receive efficient full-time education suitable to their

age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. If they fail to do so, they are guilty of an offence.

Possible actions the police and LEA could take are parenting contracts, in which parents agree to rules to improve attendance or parenting orders set up by a court, in which parents take lessons on improving children's behaviour and attendance.

Disobeying a court order can result in a £1,000 maximum fine. Penalty notices can be imposed by headteachers or the police, resulting in £100 fines to parents if their child is truant or if they allow a child have a holiday or days off during term time.

The parents of a girl who hardly went to school in seven months were recently jailed for four months. It is the first case of both parents being jailed for failing to ensure their child attends classes. The couple must serve a suspended sentence they had already received and another two months while their daughter will live with foster parents. This can be very serious, so any support offered should be taken to ensure children go to school and all warnings must be acknowledged. The parents must be able to show they have done everything possible to ensure their responsibilities are met.

→ Write in with your legal problem to [legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk](mailto:legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk) and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

## Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

# 'Every surfer is different. My boards suit individual needs'

When Justin Thorn finishes a day's work as a watch manager, you're likely find him in the chilly waters of the North Sea off Yorkshire or in his workshop making a bespoke board for another surf fanatic

**T**here can't be that many firefighters who put on a wetsuit and check out whether the swell's up when they have a day off from work. But when Justin Thorn is not rostered for duty, chances are he will be ready to plunge into rather cold water, riding the waves on a handcrafted surfboard he made himself. Or, as Justin puts it: "If there's a swell and I'm off, then I'm out." And, living just five minutes from the beach, on Yorkshire's elemental east coast, he doesn't have to travel far.

Justin, 42, used to surf in Jersey as a teenager and developed a serious taste for it on a surfing

trip to South Africa. He began his career as a retained firefighter in Oxfordshire, and spent much of his spare time surfing round the Devon and Cornwall coastline. He even tried to transfer down there, but the waiting lists were huge, and there are certainly no regrets about moving to Yorkshire instead.

Since arriving in the county he and his wife Alison have done up a run-down farmhouse and converted the old cowsheds into an upmarket bed and breakfast. Tourists don't have to be surfers to appreciate staying close to the sea, but surfers will find a lot of wave-riding opportunities.

"Surfing is massive in the South West, but it's less crowded up here, a bit more hardcore and less to do with image. In the winter, we've got some of the best surfing in Europe and there are always secret places to discover." It's wetsuits all year round. Justin says there's good camaraderie at the fire station, but some colleagues can't quite fathom the appeal of getting drenched in freezing water for fun, though a couple were intrigued enough to have given it a go. "With surfing, it's probably better to learn when it's warm so they weren't that taken with it. The cold can get the better of people. They were also quite surprised by the power of the waves round here."

## From hobby to small business

Every surfer needs a board – which is where Justin turned his own need into a hobby and then a small business – and we are not talking mass production. "Every surfer is different, and I make customised boards to suit individual needs," says Justin. "You look at where they are surfing, their age, their ability, their weight, height and how they want it to look." Justin designs, shapes, sprays laminates and glosses each board – and there are different shapes and sizes to choose from. If the order book is full, a friend helps out at the workshop Justin rents near home.



PICTURES: MARTIN JENKINSON



Justin Thorn puts the finishing touches to a board in his workshop





**'On good big-sized waves your heart's pumping a bit – the same as when you're knocking a door out of a house before you go in'**

Each board is made for a particular individual. "The bigger the board, the more float and balance you've got, the shorter the board the less float, so it's really down to the surfer to surf the wave rather than sit on top of it." Justin prefers to surf the wave – but varies his technique by experimenting with different board shapes.

People sometimes ask him to incorporate their own artwork onto a board. "I've had people coming in with designs on a scrappy bit of paper which can turn out to be a copy of their tattoo." Cartoons and slogans are also popular, and he's even done a Welsh dragon board for one surfing punter.

When Firefighter calls, he's just made a "magic" board for himself – one that perfectly suits his needs at the moment which is what he aims for with all clients.

#### **Adrenalin surges**

Justin relishes both his job as a firefighter and his life as a surfer. And with both adrenalin surges seem to come with the territory. "On good big-sized waves your heart's pumping a bit – the same as when you're knocking a door out of a house before you go in." Both job and hobby require you to be physically fit.

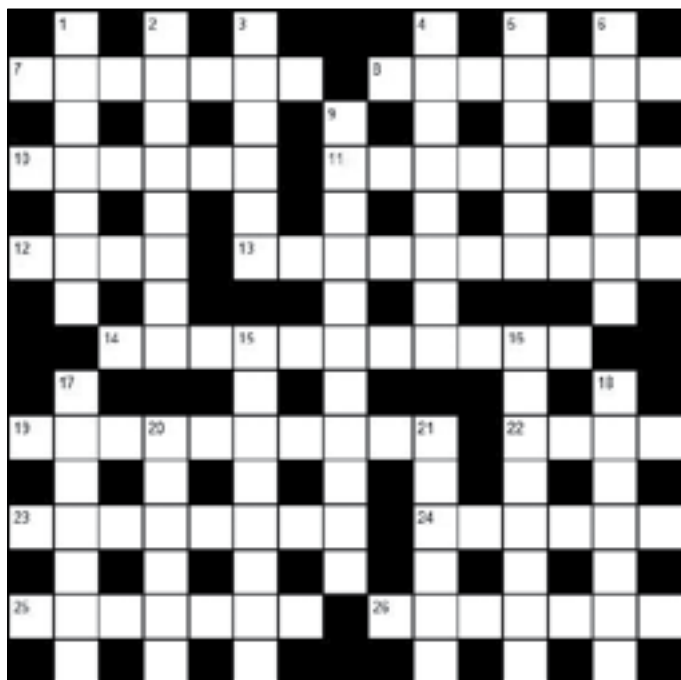
Justin has had a few scrapes – when surfing in crowded waters and people are falling into the surf – "you get the occasional board flying at you" – and cuts and bruises can follow. Which is just one of the reasons Justin prefers to avoid masses of people in the water, preferring to surf with a few friends. "We know enough breaks where no-one goes" – the 'secret spots' as they call them – "so we don't have the crowd problems. There is more satisfaction. The secret spots are always the better waves." Surfing isn't yet listed as an event in the World Firefighter Games, but if it was Justin would no doubt be up for giving it a go.

→ [www.cheekeemonkeesurf.co.uk/](http://www.cheekeemonkeesurf.co.uk/)

#### **JUSTIN THORN**

Justin Thorn is Green Watch manager at East Hull station. He joined the fire service in Oxfordshire as a retained crew member before transferring to Humberside and switching to wholetime fire fighting duties.

## Quick Crossword

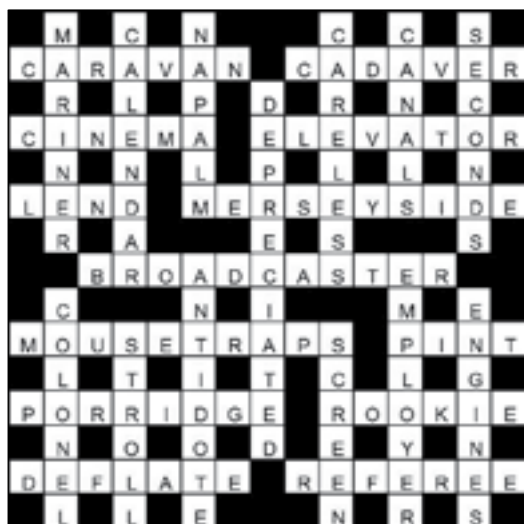


### ACROSS

- 7,10** Momentous event of 1926 (7 6)  
**8** Fruit that's bonkers! (7)  
**10** See 7 (6)  
**11** Hams it up (8)  
**12** Molten rock (4)  
**13** Very surprised (10)  
**14** Breathing apparatus (11)  
**19** They deserve dignity in their retirement (10)  
**22** Americans call them faucets (4)  
**23** Pickled herring fillets (8)  
**24** Taken hold of forcibly; jammed (6)  
**25** Military rank (7)  
**26** Erased; no longer listed or stocked (7)

### DOWN

- 1** Unbiased (7)  
**2** Kill or remove one in ten (8)  
**3** Device for taking pictures (6)  
**4** \_\_\_ sauvignon, wine grape (8)  
**5** Waterways (6)  
**6** Black leopard (7)  
**9** Mischievous ghost (11)  
**15** Raised in rank (8)  
**16** Kept back, like part-time firefighter (8)  
**17** Pressurised container of liquid released as fine spray (7)  
**18** Globes (7)  
**20** Bar or car (6)  
**21** Female sibling or union member (6)



Solution to October crossword



QUIZ IMAGES: CORBIS

## Prize Quiz

### Win a TomTom ONE satnav

Enter our prize quiz and a TomTom ONE satnav could be yours. This month fire and light 'in festivals'. Just name the country in which these festivals are celebrated using the following clues.

**1** Diwali is celebrated by both Hindus and Sikhs, normally in October/November.

**2** 'Sankt Hans aften' also known as 'St John's Eve' is celebrated by beach bonfires on the night of 23 June, near to the summer solstice.

**3** Dating back to 1605, bonfires originally lit as thanksgiving that King James I had been saved, today burn poor old Guy.

**4** An ancient gaelic festival marking the beginning of summer. A revived Beltane Fire Festival is today celebrated on the night of 30 April in Edinburgh.

**5** An annual Buddhist festival commemorating ancestors, Obon is celebrated in summer. At the end of Obon, floating lanterns are put into rivers, lakes and seas to guide spirits back to their world.

**6** In Las Fallas, a festival in March, probably originated to celebrate the onset of Spring, huge 'ninots' – papier mache statues – are burnt.

### HOW TO ENTER

To win a TomTom ONE satnav unit, send your answers to the prize quiz by 31 December on a postcard to: Prize Competition (Nov/Dec 2006), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

Answers to October quiz

1. Tamales
2. Hotdogs
3. Goulash
4. Curry
5. Barbicues
6. Jamaican patty

Winner of the September quiz was Robbie Taylor of Bodmin, Cornwall





# StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

## McGuirkyside stories



My cat tray is overflowing with stories from McGuirkyside including lots of emails from Beloved Leader and CFO Tony McGuirk. In one email he makes the incredible admission that the state of staff morale within his brigade was "at an all time low or rock bottom".

Not exactly Mr Motivator then. And you'd have thought he would have kept it quiet from those blissfully unaware of the bullying and vindictive culture of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

But there was an amazing turnaround in morale as Mr Morale-buster was desperate to shout about in an email.

The views of the greatest living chief officer in the history of the fire service will not be stifled, and Station Cat needs to spread the word on Tony's behalf.

In an email to councillors and Sausage Chips And BeanS eaters he says it plainly: "For the first time in my career morale is no longer at an al (sic) time low or rock bottom". The strike has meant morale "is very high indeed and will continue to be so!"

So you have it from the horse's mouth (or is it the Donkey's behind?).

Striking lifts morale, even in a fire service driven to the depths of despair by Tony McGuirk.

## Focus gripes



Staffordshire Fire Authority put its very own private consultation machine in place during a public consultation over cuts. It was ably assisted by South Wales based Opinion Research Services, a company which, it turns out, is used by many other fire services.

It appears part of the 'public consultation' included a series of 'focus groups' involving members of the public paid to attend a presentation outlining the fire authority's cuts "message". A total of six focus groups were made up of members of the public and, interestingly, three groups made up of staff at a total cost of £13,743.

Questions are now being asked about what weight was attached to the views of the tiny number who attended these private (and closed) meetings which only heard one side of the story (the fire authority's side naturally) as compared to the thousands who attended public meetings and signed petitions opposing the cuts. "Appalling, disgraceful and disgusting" are only a few of the words used by some residents in the local press when they heard the news.

But why target the staff as well? It could not possibly be to gauge the strength of feeling over potential industrial action with a few carefully disguised questions? That really would be a scandalous waste of public money, so perish the thought.

Interestingly enough, the fire service clients listed by ORS have been involved in highly controversial cuts (and in some cases including industrial action ballots). The list includes Merseyside, West Midlands, Northumberland, Lothian and Borders, South Wales and West Yorkshire.

There must have been a whole host of reasons to have staff focus groups about the cuts that had nothing to do with the staff reaction to them. Dismiss the thought immediately.

## Yes to O2



A howler appears regarding FireLink at paragraph 80 (p17) in the Government's response to the Select Committee report into the fire service, and FireControl in particular. It says the FireLink Project Team "engaged" with Lancashire and Shropshire FRSS "to understand better the challenges they have faced with their early introduction to the O2 Airwave system."

Cynical correspondents have pointed out such challenges in Lancashire included being forced to decide which prestigious sporting events to attend courtesy of an O2 freebie. The effusive endorsement of O2 Airwave has been removed from the Lancashire FRS website since it became publicly known one very highly placed officer was forced into the O2 enclosure at Twickenham.



# 25 year badges



**Steve Taylor (right)** Buxton, Derbyshire receives his 25 year badge from Assistant Brigade Secretary Dave Munt (left) alongside a few of his Red Watch colleagues



**Steve Vincett (right)** receives his 25-year badge from Barry Oakes, Region 10 West of England Officers Chair



**Tony Burgess (left)** receives his 25-year badge from Station Manager Pan Poullais – Region 10 Officers Secretary



South West Region Chair Phil Jordan presented badges to (l-r back) Rob Eaton, Bob Jones, Martin Innes, Dave Griffiths and (front l-r) Paul Sumners and Jim Carmen



**Phil Dempsey (left)** of Green Watch Sevenoaks Fire Station, Kent, receives his 25-year badge from Neil Thornewell, South Division Secretary



**Mick Elliott (left)**, Crew Manager Red Watch Sevenoaks Fire Station, Kent, receives his 25-year badge from Neil Thornewell, South Division Secretary



**Pat O'Sullivan (left)**, Watch Manager Sevenoaks Fire Safety Office, Kent, receives his 25-year badge from Neil Thornewell, South Division Secretary



**Phil Lawrence (left)** receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 Officers Secretary



**Ray Watkinson (left)** receives his 25-year badge from Pan Poullais, Region 10 Officers Secretary

## FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **Region 1 Scotland**  
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01rs@fbu.org.uk

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Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ  
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02rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**  
1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,  
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06gen@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**  
195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,  
West Midlands, B64 6HE  
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07rs@fbu.org.uk

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4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,  
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01656 867910  
08rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**  
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Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL  
01376 521521  
10ra@fbu.org.uk  
09rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 10 London**  
John Horner Mews, Frome Street,  
Islington, London, N1 8PB  
020 7359 3638  
london@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**  
Fire Station, Coldharbour Road,  
Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT  
01474 320473  
11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**  
The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High  
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE  
01494 513034  
12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**  
158 Muller Road, Horfield,  
Bristol, BS7 9RE  
0117 935 5132  
13rs@fbu.org.uk

## Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

## FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

**0808 100 6061**

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.



Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include **FULL DETAILS** for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.